

Illegitimacy of Plagiarism Norms

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Illegitimacy of Plagiarism Norms

Abstract

The concept of plagiarism is often vague and does not hold a comprehensive understanding. Its vagueness has contributed to many culprits going unpunished. Many dictionaries define plagiarism simply as “literary theft.” Plagiarism is the theft of thoughts, creativity, and ideas of another person with the aim of owning it without acknowledging the input of the source. It is a crime. In 1990, Neal Bowers published a poem titled “Tenth-Year Elegy” in the *Poetry* journal². A year later, Bowers discovers that another poet by the name David Sumner had copied line after line of the poem and published it in the *Mankato Poetry Review* as his own and gave it a new title – “Someone forgotten.” Later on, Bowers published “*Words for the Taking*,” a memoir that described Sumner’s actions as a “crime.”³

Plagiarism deceives readers and gives the plagiarist undeserved credits while hurting the plagiarized authors. All plagiarism norms are illegitimate and not justified. The cheating that is plagiarism earns plagiarists undeserved awards such as academic certificates. In his memoir, after learning of the actions of David Sumner, Bowers explains how he spent languid afternoons at home while thinking about his “thief,” when he should have been writing poems. Bowers describes how he was there wishing for something to be done against Sumner’s plagiarism actions, although he did not know what that “something” was or should have been.

² Adam, Lee. "Student Perspectives on Plagiarism 36." *Handbook of academic integrity* (2016): 519.

³ Adam, 2016

Introduction

Plagiarism is a literary crime that is not limited to theft of ideas without giving credit to the source, but it also entails knowingly or unknowingly providing wrong citations away from the ones used. Many scholars describe plagiarism as theft, although it is not understood as such in the contemporary world. In the majority of plagiarism cases, the legal proceedings are not always conducted in the line of a typical theft case. This fact is mainly because of the vagueness of the topic of plagiarism and its undefined forms and norms. In 1991, David Sumner published line for line of Neal Bower's Tenth-Year Elegy, a year after Bower had published it in the *Poetry* journal. When Bower discovers this injustice against his work, he only sits and hopes that something happens, although he does not precisely know what that something is. There is a lack of comprehensiveness on matters of plagiarism, which leaves some of its practices to go unnoticed and unpunished.

What then really does plagiarism constitute? In 1998, Madonna, a mega pop star, released yet another song to her collection of hits⁴. Little did she know that she would later be arraigned and tasked on proving the originality of "Frozen." Seven years after "Frozen" hit the studios, a famous Belgium songwriter, Acquaviva Salvatore, accused Madonna of using parts of "Ma Vie Fout L'camp" in her song⁵. The Belgian won the court duel, and Madonna was instructed to withdraw all her compact discs containing the song "Frozen" from the Belgian market. Televisions and Radios in Belgium were also not to play the song. The case of Madonna confirms how confusing the subject of plagiarism is, and that any artist or individual can unconsciously commit the offense. As discussed in this short entry, however, plagiarism can never be justified and ought to be punished because of its numerous negative impacts.

The Disturbing Vagueness of the Concept of Plagiarism

In academic research, plagiarism is often attached to the number of words a scholar can import from another source. It is known as the string-based criterion. Generally, the gauge

⁴ Dougherty, M. V. "The Pernicious Effects of Compression Plagiarism on Scholarly Argumentation." *Argumentation* 33, no. 3 (2019): 391-412.

⁵ Dougherty, 2019

equates plagiarism with the use of three, four, or seven consecutive words that may be found in two different academic works. According to Hexham⁶, academics will need to use quotation marks followed by an appropriate reference when they use more than four consecutive words from published works; otherwise, it will amount to plagiarism. There is no standard for choosing the length of the string. Copied words get so much attention, probably because they are easier to detect. It becomes more challenging and less straightforward to detect plagiarism of ideas.

There exists no universal consensus on the definition of plagiarism. Some scholars, such as Sorokina⁷, chose to assign seven consecutive words to the string criterion because, to them, six words hold some false positives while there is a likelihood of detecting plagiarism details on using eight. Such an explanation already collides with Hexham's and also does not account for other forms of plagiarism. The string criterion might be successfully used to define and uncover cases of plagiarism. However, it will mean that using seven identical words as the base for plagiarism makes copying six words without crediting the source a virtue. Also, using different types of software to detect plagiarism often gives varied results, raising more confusion.

There is a growing lack of effect or detection of plagiarism in published works. Many learning institutions forget or deliberately ignore checking copied content when their students turn in work. Such incidences leave plagiarists unpunished and promote the behavior. Copying and pasting published work may take less than three minutes, and paraphrasing may take up to six hours, while the actual research may have taken years. The copied and pasted work might not be difficult to detect while the paraphrased one will likely get a clean score from a plagiarism software. The extensive use of such methods of checking plagiarism only makes plagiarists hide better, while the owners of the researches continue to lose their work.

The issue of plagiarism continues to become more binary. There are only two describing ends; plagiarism and no plagiarism. There is no degree of plagiarism. When checking for plagiarism in papers, the results are clear cut between the absence or presence of matching content. Besides, the automatic inspection of content shows a lack of trust by the institutions towards their students. It is often marred with the presumption of guilt. Some scholars, such as Bechhoefer, argue that conducting mandatory testing only increases the plagiarism norms. The

⁶ Dougherty, 2019

⁷ Dougherty, 2019

situation is similar to doping in sports where there is exists mandatory urine testing once in a while, yet the practice remains common among athletes.

Consequences of Plagiarism

Impact on Authors

Plagiarizing does not only end at stealing someone's piece of work but extends to claiming to be the author of it. The feeling of the loss of work can be devastating to the author. In his memoir, after David Sumner stole pieces of his work, Neal Bower explains how he was not able to continue writing poems as he figured his ordeal. Bower says that he spent many languid afternoons fantasizing and thinking of the injustice that had been done to him and hoped that some action could be taken against Sumner. Even if everybody is aware of the owner of the work, the plagiarized will naturally feel violated.

Every person has a unique mind and varied extents of ability. Robbery of the work of mind is exceptional and calls for suitable compensation. Theft of the work of mind is akin to breaching a person's personality, which detrimental effects on their emotional well-being. The rights of personality are not transferable; therefore, punitive measures should be directed to the plagiarist while the plagiarized should be given ample and suitable compensation for their violation. Currently, there is no existing law that provides a comprehensive framework for the compensation of lost work of the mind⁸. As a result, many promising authors are overwhelmed and walk out of their calling of art as soon as they join.

Plagiarism also infringes on the future rights of the author⁹. When the ideas of the initial work of an author are stolen, he or she ceases to hold the rights of the work or research, including the future work on the topic. As such, when the author continues to publish, he or she will have to cite and credit the plagiarist. The plagiarist will own the manuscript which part of the chronological sequence of the research; therefore, any subsequent author or user of the subject will be obliged to cite the same manuscript. If the plagiarist published the initial ideas before the owner, all of the subsequent on the research earns the thief credit. However, if the

⁸ Adam, 2016

⁹ Dougherty, 2019

owner were lucky to publish before the plagiarist, it would be easier to claim the rights of the work.

Often, new authors or artists are more at a loss than their established counterparts. Some young authors may be thrilled to present their preliminary results at a conference, oblivious to other greedy members. Such thirsty authors steal the content of the unsuspecting young and energetic researchers¹⁰. In other cases, some dishonest established authors recruit or offer to join teams of the emerging ones in their research. Soon enough, the established author walks away with all the work of a team, often for monetary gain. In such cases, the victims, who are the young authors, often down their tools in surrender, even after months or years of research. When the energetic and fresh minds prematurely leave the field of research, it is the science that becomes the biggest loser.

Impact on Readers

Plagiarism degrades the foundations of knowledge. When a work of art or sciences is plagiarized, the link to its origin or prior knowledge is broken. Readers will be able to read-only as far as the broken link, and they would not get the chance to access the sources. The sources of information are a precious resource for readers to expand their knowledge and understanding of the topic. It gives the origin and background information. If not available, the knowledge of the audience is limited, and the subsequent researches and information would probably not make sense.

Basically, plagiarists indulge in their criminal acts for their self-gain, usually monetary. A plagiarist grabs any type of information available. Some of the works may be finished while others may be unfinished. Other greedy individuals rush to publish information that is in the field that they are not competent in and do not hold a slight knowledge of. In such a case, the plagiarist will not be able to tell if the information is beneficial to readers or not. When such half-baked material is disposed to the readers, they will not gain knowledge or value for their money and time.

Often, plagiarists do not copy and paste the entire work from a publisher. They borrow patches of information from various pieces of work and publications, pretending to give them

¹⁰ Rowland F., 2002, The Peer-Review Process, Learned Publishing, 15, 4, pp. 247-258.

new meanings¹¹. It is easy to figure how such post-modern artists proceed, taking collages of work from various genres or views and pretend to be uncovering new ideas on a complex reality. The result of these actions only disrupts citation conventions. It raises a question of why there be a need for making a patchwork of ideas or texts from various contexts and analysis levels with jumbled epistemological perceptions?

Impact on Science

Plagiarism promotes sloppy research. A once highly efficient researcher may slide to a “one-off” act of plagiarism, which may grow to levels that the individual will not do without. The plagiarist will perform the offense once in a while until the laziness grows into a habit and eventually ignores the moral distinction. Although most of the plagiarists are aware of their sinful acts, they gradually bend the norms until carelessness and addiction overpower them. Such individuals will no longer be able to distinguish between fake knowledge from real science. Such a researcher, who does not hesitate to lift other people’s ideas, promote sloppy research, because they are likely to apply the same method when they are “inventing” empirical evidence.

Plagiarism thwarts the input of scientific journals in society. Scientific journals hold a high reputation among scholars. There exists a persistent myth that they guard academic knowledge. According to Rowland, scientific journals have four essential functions that many scientists identify with¹². They are the diffusion of knowledge, upholding the reputation and rankings of authors, controlling of the quality of publications, and archiving the standards of knowledge. The scientific journals are a reference for institutions that want to hire researchers for varied tasks. They also present the most qualified individuals to hold leadership positions in various laboratories or research institutions.

Plagiarism also deprives science research of the workforce¹³. Many young scientists often abandon their desire for research as soon as they lose their work to their greedy seniors. Some plagiarists often parade themselves as mentors to the new scientists. They offer to give guidance and share experience, only to run away with the ideas of the young researchers and subordinates. In scientific conferences, some “seniors” are always ready to convert preliminary of young

¹¹ Dougherty, 2019

¹² Rowland, 2002

¹³ Adam, 2016

scientists to their own. Co-authors and co-researchers are other potential avenues of loss of ideas. Young researchers often give up from the field of research when they discover that other individuals will always be ready to gain from others' toil¹⁴.

Impact on the “System”

Plagiarism defrauds society. Every person's day is limited to twenty-four hours, and it takes from several months to years for descent research to conclude. However, some researchers' CVs may contain some miraculous numbers of research publications¹⁵. This sad situation can only be blamed on plagiarism. The vice allows for researchers to lengthen their publications because recruitment commissions and promotions depend on quantity. Thus, plagiarism rewards cheating at the expense of an honest author. In some cases, some authors use the same article several times to add length to the CV. This scenario also equates to fraud.

The education system is another sector that suffers the effects of plagiarism. Basically, educational establishments and their systems are the primary victims of plagiarism by researchers. When media exposes forms of plagiarism in an education system or institution, the credibility of the system and the public image of the establishment are damaged and harms all stakeholders, including the management and other innocent students. The modern media is so advanced that it can act more quickly than the official inquiry boards of learning institutions.

Institutions suffer massive costs in fighting plagiarism. When a college embarks on the fight against plagiarism, it first has to set up a commission of inquiry, and the investigation is often time-consuming and costly. Such investigations include many stakeholders, such as lawyers and investigators, whose costs in salaries and allowances can amount to large amounts. Other losses to the institution include time lost and reputation damages. Besides, when plagiarism is uncovered in different departments of a university or a research laboratory, more time and resources are spent to make sure that the worm has not infested the whole establishment.

Plagiarism is often associated with the presumption of guilt, which brings out the worst in people. When plagiarism scandals hit a section of individuals, it discredits the whole profession¹⁶

¹⁴ Dougherty, 2019

¹⁵ Dougherty, 2019

¹⁶ Adam, 2016

. Plagiarism allegations encourage rumors about the integrity of a particular profession. In this way, few original authors who may have unknowingly published a few poorly constructed sentences find their work associated with plagiarism. It becomes even more damaging for the influential figures who hold political, academic, or religious positions¹⁷. The “plagiarism hunters” may find pleasure in spreading the word over matters that may not even be academic or well examined.

Conclusion

Plagiarism is the theft of literary ideas and texts. Due to its detrimental effects against the owner of the work and other fields, the acts of plagiarism are described as “robbery” and “crime.” The whole concept of plagiarism, however, is vague and does not have a comprehensive meaning or understanding. Although many in society agree that plagiarism equates theft, the vice is not treated as such, and often, the plagiarist goes unpunished while the plagiarized has no one to turn to. The illegitimate practice of plagiarism presents many harsh negative impacts on individuals, institutions, and society. Plagiarism leads to loss of work and the future rights of an author. It demotivates creative minds from continuing to find solutions to the problems facing humanity. It also deprives readers of more knowledge by blocking the availability of sources of information.

Science is undoubtedly the most affected field by plagiarism. The young and energetic minds that scientific research needs often leave the scene as quickly as they came in because of greedy seniors who are always ready to take credit for the work of unsuspecting individuals. It also reduces the credibility of scientific journals and institutions. One most effective method to avoid plagiarism is conducting your own research and providing original ideas. Another way is to give due credit to the author or the owner of the idea by providing comprehensive citations.

¹⁷ Dougherty, 2019

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